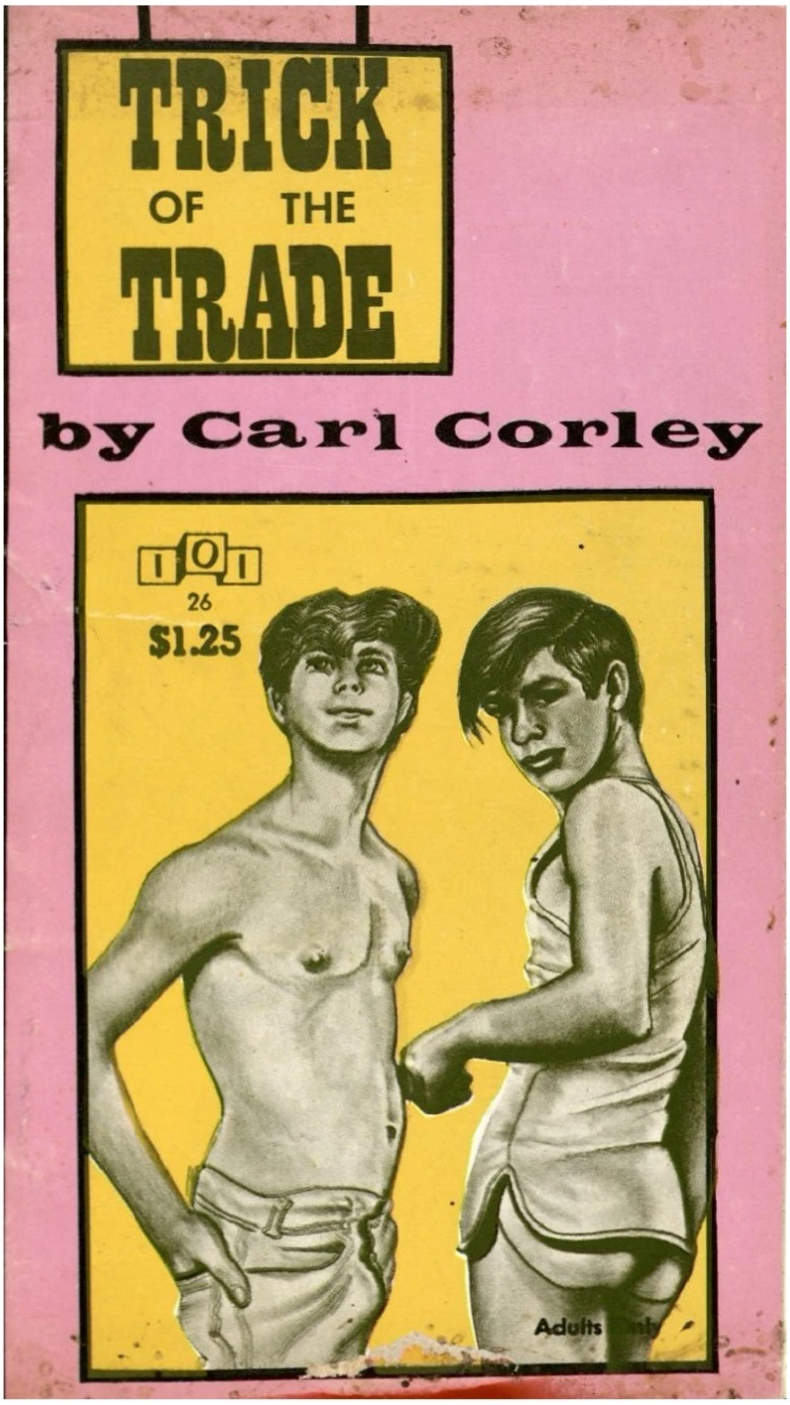
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Carl Corley

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"A man is a lion in his own cause."
— Scottish proverb

CHAPTER 1

Trag Blazer took off his marine barracks cap, wiped the sweat from his suntanned brow, and cursed the awesome Southern heat. In his raw, pent up mood, he was beginning to curse everything in his life: the marines, the mangy town of Baton Rouge, his sweaty uniform darkly stained around his armpits and crotch, the Greyhound bus terminal swarming with waiting people, the grinding of the bus as it pulled in lazily, reluctantly at the drab building he thought the exact color of hospital green.

"If I don't find something to go to bed with tonight I'm going to go right out of my mind," he fumed, cursing anew that he had decided to take a furlough in the first place.

He concluded, disheartened, that he would be better off if he had remained at the naval base in Corpus Christi, guarding the gate, sixteen hours off and four on, doing what he damned pleased after riding that twenty miles into Corpus Christi, joining its circus of honky-tonks and dance halls and lounges alive with drunks and easily available prostitutes. Not that he liked prostitutes. For his twenty six years, he had been in only one house. That was out on the west coast… a little, cheap hovel directly off Broadway in San Diego.

"Much rather have a man. It's lots more fun and safer, too," he surmised. He pressed his muscular thighs together at the thought of the erotic sensation. "It's cleaner," he kept on dreaming, as the bus pulled into the terminal, put on brakes, and ground to a halt. "And a real hot guy can do more to make me feel good than all the broads in the whole damned world."

He laughed at that, which was his way, and felt enormous pride for the pressure he felt in his tight summer khaki pants. Rising from his seat, even though it showed enormously, obviously at his crotch, he fumbled for his canvas overnight bag, found it, and stumbled down the aisle and out onto the crowded platform.

It was rubbing middles now, girls in miniskirts pushing their way around him, and boys, obviously of college age, flamboyant in mustard colored hip huggers and silky shirts, wide white belts and shiny black boots, sliding their behinds past his. Or, their protruding crotches rubbed against his crotch as if in a friendly hello.

Gaining the double doors, Trag managed to push through the crowd and into the head where he took a much needed piss. Standing at the urinal next to him was a man about fifty, bald, fat, looking so much like an Easter egg with some of the icing dangling. He had his pants open and showed little of interest. He reeled back and forth like humpty dumpty, soused!

Trag unzipped his pants with a deliberate thrust, baiting the fat old queer, and exposed himself, holding tightly, while making the most obscene gestures. It gave him a thrill to expose himself like this, feeling enormous pride that he was being admired, not only by the drunken fat man but by several more queens who lined the urinal trough, eagerly casing the gay ones who stood around.

He took so much pride in face that it provoked within his hard, muscular body a semblance of passion... a passion long overdue to erupt, and his pulses lifted an inch or two, as if being hoisted by an invisible string.

The fat man's mouth began to water, and he rolled his eyes like a jersey bull that had been stabbed in the vital place with a hay fork.

"Lay a ten on you... er... soldier," the fat man said. Rather he pleaded, not so much with his voice, or what he said, but with his eyes, which shifting from Trag's groin then to his stares, advertised the sexual agony with which he internally wrestled.

"For what?" Trag snapped back. Though he hungered for a hot mouth wrapped around him, he couldn't stand a fat man, nor an old man, and this drunk was both.

He loved them young, good looking, and above all else manly, as much man as he was, more maybe, with the one exception that they loved to swing on another man. He despised queens, too, those swishing faggots who should have been girls, but missed their calling.

The fat man, as if coming to sober life, looked at him askew and cast up his shoulders.

"For what?" he murmured, slobbering. "Now, ain't you the green one! Here you are, showing it all off to me, and me willingly offering you a ten spot, and you up and say... for what?"

Trag baited him further, enjoying the minute situation, ignoring the other fruits who were listening avidly to all that was being said.

"Okay, fatty! So I ask you again... for what?"

The fat man quivered, swayed on his feet, his putty-like expression taking on the unsubstantial semblance of fear and doubt.

"I wanta work on you... er... sailor!"

Trag's eyes popped. Lifting his cap, he let his black hair tumble over his wrinkled brow. He had met some real queer ones... but this fat faggot took the cake!

"You'll get it right in a minute," he said to the fat man, abashed that the man could not recognize his uniform, of which he was both overly proud and vain, almost to the point of

battle.

"Marine," the fat man bellowed, smiling like a clown, as if he had suddenly solved the miracle of the ages. "What you say, Marine? A ten spot. And... if you're as good as I think you are, ah'll plant… another saw buck on you… eh?"

Trag reeled in himself, zipped up his fly, and gave the fat man the finger. Then he hurried out of the head.

"I don't need my nuts cracked that bad," he mumbled to himself, as he went to the serving counter and ordered a Coke. Two young girls in Camelot hair falls eyed him wantonly, whom he completely ignored. The ratty waitress, done up in a mat of greasy curls and a ton of make-up came on with him so strong he picked up his Coke and sauntered off to the magazine rack.

With dumb, absent stares he thumbed through the best of them, or what he considered the best, watched out of the corner of his eye a sissy kid who purposely stood so close to him he nudged him in the groin with his elbow.

Then, in a mood of temper, stalked over to the jukebox which stood near a huge window panel which let in the twilight, the sad southern beauty of the night, without letting in the clammy heat. The air-conditioning within felt good to his weary frame, and dried the wet places under his armpits and crotch.

He dropped in a quarter, punched "I Want Candy," "Judy In Disguise," and "I Am A Carpenter." Nothing came up. He impatiently kicked the machine. Finally, the sounds of "I Am a Carpenter" drifted up in its melancholy refrain, the throaty voice of Bobby Darin infiltrating the enormous terminal.

"Hell!" he said half-aloud, disgusted with himself, this town, the world. "If only I hadn't promised Ted we'd go on a tear in New Orleans!"

Ted Brenson was also a marine, a buck sergeant like himself, who had served time in Corpus Christi Naval Base before transferring to the Jackson Barracks in New Orleans. They were the best of friends, about the same age, and liked the same things, with the exception of queers, which Ted hated, and a subject neither discussed. In fact, Trag had never discussed his sexual cravings with anyone, especially another marine. Queers were a taboo subject in the armed forces. Men who harbored such desires, harbored them in silence, or else faced disgrace and court martial.

Ted Brenson had written some time ago begging him to take a thirty day furlough and they'd do the town together, and finally he had agreed. Now, standing in this mangy cafe, this Greyhound bus terminal, with a night's layover, he was tired, weary. His nerves were strung of patience, his sexual cravings having run the gauntlet. He cursed ever having been so weak as to give in to Ted's fanciful whims.

Standing at the enormous plate glass windows, windows that reached from floor to the high ceiling, alone, as most service men are on leave, he looked out onto the night scene with a tinge of sadness in his heart. He knew absolutely nothing about Baton Rouge, only that it was the capital of Louisiana. Also, that it the furthest inland harbor in the world, foreign ships from all over drifting into the municipal docks to load and unload supplies.

They were in tonight, he could tell. A forest of mastheads and spires and smokestacks made startling silhouettes against the reddening sky in the west, beyond the buildings and the silvery floor of the Mississippi river. Now and then one of them would let out a hollow sound, signaling to other incoming ships, or going out toward the Gulf of Mexico. Those sounds filled the hollowness in his own lonely heart, and magnified and intensified his aloneness and acute unhappiness.

CHAPTER 2

Trag had left his canvas overnight bag back at the eating counter, so he went back and got it, rather sadly, and, paying his check, went out the double-glass doors and into the tepid night.

It was uphill to the main section of town and he climbed it drudgingly, eyeing with faint-heartiness the few strollers who passed him coming and going along the dark street. Boys mostly, of that seedy teen-age look, faces pox marked with pimples, hair like that of Caesar or the Beatles, pants too tight and utterly too short in length, many of them bare-legged, wearing thronged sandals. There were girls, too, but older. How much older! Hard, coarse, not at all like the movie type so typical of southern women. They eyed him coquettishly as he passed, giggled to one another, and slowed their hip-swaying gait, as if purposely signaling him the cue to pause and join them.

He went on, regardless of time or direction.

Trag passed a huge gray building sitting within a block to itself, a building which looked more like a fort than a building of industry or commerce. It was surrounded by a tall black wrought-iron fence and an enormous iron gate, opening onto a cathedral-like façade. On the lower depths, meandering down to the river, was a concrete wall. This was crowded with grimy, sullen, teenage boys.

"The meat rack!" Trag surmised knowingly, as he passed them with a rush. "Selling their little hairless behinds by the night for a buck, a pack of cigarettes, a meal, a night's lodging." He grunted disgustingly. "Makes me sick! Makes me want to vomit!" He spit on the grimy sidewalk, in indignation of this loathing. He hated what it stood for, more than for its sexual content. Prostitution! Male prostitution! He couldn't, and was forever unable to hate queers, like other men seemingly hated queers… like every marine, to their declarations, hated queers.

His mother and father had died when he was thirteen. He had to live with his uncle, a man who lived along. Since that first night on his arrival at his uncle's home, his uncle had initiated him, and almost nightly until he finished high school and had joined the marines. He had grown to love it, along with loving his uncle. He did everything for him, clothed him, sent him to school, gave him spending money, a car, provided for him all the essentials in life. It was for this priceless reason he could not bring himself to hate queers.

But prostitution was something else!

He spit again on the sidewalk at the memory. Puny, smooth skinned brats, smelling of sweat and dirty feet and

brilliantine, dolling out their little smelly bottoms to some man for money! He had never sold himself to any man. And he declared he never would. He enjoyed having a guy, the thrill of it for the thrill of it. He understood the homosexual world, through his uncle, if no way else. But it had to be for kicks and not anything as morbid as making a cash arrangement out of it.

Thinking about these things as he ventured along through the hot, stifling southern heat, he realized that he had grown into a hard, sinewy man, despite his constant relation and influence with his uncle. Despite this intimate relationship, he had not been robbed of his masculinity not his masculine outlook on life.

For this twenty-six years he was whole and sound, the wild rhythms in his healthy body flowing with exquisite pitch. He had matured rather early (perhaps due to this sexual relation), had blossomed into a well proportioned youth, handsome features, black hair, heavy of bicep and thigh, rigidly hardened. He was acceptable to Marine life and the rugged atmosphere to which he abounded fully and completely.

Added to his virile manhood was a dominate, cocky air, and a sureness of mind and muscle, of determination and grit. He possessed neither the slackness nor softness usually associated with boys who have had sexual relations early in life with their own sex.

In fact, as his uncle had informed him many times previously, and he had grown to believe and accept himself, that their nightly relation had helped greatly to build him physically and mentally, had siphoned into his blood vessels and into the rigidity of his nerves that beautiful balancing and emotional tide which had helped to calm and soothe and mature him during the years ahead.

“It is like pouring water on a rose,” his uncle had said to him many times. “The more I take you, the more beautiful you become.”

Trag had believed this explicitly. Having his uncle between his legs, massaging his strong body with his mouth, caressing his leg, check and arm muscles while he groped, did much to empower him with greater strength, empowering him with vigor and maturity and into gorgeous blossom.

Growing up into eager, fresh manhood under this sexual charade, he had never considered it strange nor queer. Not in the same sense other boys, or the marines considered it. The act seemed so natural to have his uncle love him. That was the only kind of relation he had ever had with him. He never considered at the time if this course would change and alter his nature about sex in the future.

Actually, it hadn't. The seeds of his robust, domineering father, implanted in the womb of his sensuous mother, had forged him as a total man, a normal male, too strongly imposed for a man like his uncle to inflict a change.

He had enjoyed the carnal lovemaking as only a means to a fellup to his enormous sexual appetite, and nothing more.

It had not altered his determined mind, nor vexed his physical endeavors. Predominately he liked the opposite sex. Yet, he did not go out of his way to seek them out, to pursue them, to court them, to seduce them. But he had gone out of his way to look for queers.

As tonight, ambling up this steep incline to the main section of Baton Rouge, Trag lurked, so it seemed, prowled to seek out his male counterpart, and once sought, to bring him to bay in an orgy of gross sex play.

It had been months since he had had sex of any nature, not even to fool with himself. The guard duty company had been so engrossed in summer clean ups, repainting the barracks, cleaning out the long line of swimming pools, drills, inspections. Trag had found little time to indulge in the sexes. There was always some duty at the Naval base, guarding the gates, nursing drunk sailors when they returned from shore leave, escorting the Captain's daughters on a tridle trail which had been marked off around the base, feeding and catering to the riding horses when they came in fatigued and lathered, chasing some sailor A.W.O.L., or mess duty. Every hour was taken up by some manual duty, however trivial they seemed, however unimportant.

Guarding the two main gates he didn't mind. This meant only four hours out of sixteen, with nothing to do in between but play and goof off. Sometimes he would take eight hours for straight guard duty then have thirty-six hours off, if he cared to spend weekends in Corpus Christi, or a trip down into Mexico to Mexico City or Juarez to see the bull fights on Sundays. The marines could alter their duty on the gates any way they so pleased, so long as two men stood at the gate at all times, day and night. But for the past few months he had been shelved into one of the main barracks which housed the seventy-five marines in the Naval base. His duties had been rigid and disciplined. And one as hot natured as Trag, this meant little less than purgatory. In fact, it was purgatory.

Just to glance at this body when dressing, or during his shower period, and he would instantly get all worked up, or, like some of the marines had remarked: A thought will make it rise!

Though Trag Blazer was only five feet four, a bantam cock in a barnyard of Plymouths, like most short people he was well proportioned and as hard as a rock, each muscle with a distinct

definition that made him look at all times as if he was flexing every sinew at the same time. Added to this tautness of contour and plane was the wild play of veins which ran gamut over his frame, strung like wet cords, recklessly scattering the length of him in a wile fanfare, enchanting, alluring, provocative!

Added still to this gift of maleness was his enormous power, abnormal really in accordance with his height and slight weight, but tantalizingly stimulating to the viewer who beheld his young body in a shower, on the beach, at night in his marine bunk where he always reclined buck naked.

This enormity of power he blamed… or credited… to his uncle. His constant manipulation and other means of arousal all during his earlier years with him had added immensely to his rapid and overly ripe growth. Like the muscles in a forearm that rise and swell under the pressures of daily exercise, so did his young body grow from continuous handling and massaging. He had had some difficulties in controlling his urges when he walked. Furthermore, he knew that all eyes were upon this huge bulge whenever he walked down the street.

Many times, he remembered, he had fallen asleep with his uncle between his legs slobbering. He had awakened the next morning to find him still there, his bald head buried in his young, tender, uplifted thighs. On such mornings he felt all red and irritated. His inner thighs were bruised and chafed raw by the scraping of his uncle's beard. To him this was only a part of life, of growing up, of enduring for grownups, the grownup world. He had never complained, nor had he bothered his young head to pursue it mentally.

"Every boy ain't as lucky as you," his uncle had lied to him. "Nobody to love them like I do every night, just so you can grow up strong and hard and built like the man you was meant to be."

This one expression, somehow, had been his uncle's creed, and Trag had accepted it as such, and had lived by it explicitly.

Well… at least he was built!

He tried, musedly, to hum a little song, the marine hymn actually, as he topped the concrete hill to Government Street and Third. There he passed a tiny square, like a miniature of most of the town squares in small southern cities. There was a monument of a Confederate soldier, with the flags or Louisiana and of the confederacy and of the United States limp in the stifling, night heat. No breeze stirred, to lift even one leaf on the magnolias and oaks which made an arc around the square. It was as if a woolen blanket had been dropped down onto the buildings, trapping the rancid air, the sodden filth of the streets.

People milled absently about, mere shadowy ghosts infiltrating the vacant places, around the lights, moving in and out between the buildings, off on foraging expeditions. Sex hungry, cautious with an abandon that knew no bounds, their wanton eyes as they passed him glinted with piercing lights, hard, cold, like glass.

Trag was so blue and so disheartened at the inactivity, the lack of actions, the crummy people shifting along the dark, lonely street that he was about to throw in the towel, to give up for the night and return to the bus station to sit it out. That was when he noticed a little bar in the middle of the block on Third Street.

It was called the 7 C's. Its sailor cap designed sign blinking out its gory signal stop a circular canvas canopy which hung life a funeral pall above the door. Pink and blue neon tubes circled and ran askew, like something was happening, perhaps a psychedelic haze to sodden drunks, a beacon to them, a fantastic lure, and there was a tiny black window about the size of a sheet of stationary paper cut in the door, so that those inside could look out, but those on the outside could not peer in. Flanking the door were glass paneled display windows which advertised popular brands of liquor and beer.

Trag, without reluctance, opened the door and went in.

Though it was all but midnight dark within, lit only by a scanty illumination of lights jutted out from red velvet textured walls, he recognized it instantly as a hustling bar. Its clientele was of too wide a discrimination in dress and manner to be anything else but a hustling bar. Boys were decked out in tight jeans and boots, most of them cowboy. They sat next to sailors in luminous white. Intermingled along the palmetto colored bar sat raunchy women in simmering sequins, young girls in mini-skirts, peddle pushers, opera pumps and snake hose. At the tables along the wall were crammed foreigners from the Greek and Italian ships in the harbor, long haired students from the local college, drifters, pushers, vamps, junkies, tea heads, nymphos, shags, vagrants, studhustlers, male hustlers, pick pockets and ratty male prostitutes. With them, as Trag's dark eyes scanned the motley crowd in an instant, were cleverly infiltrated chorus boy beauties, dikes, star goddesses, L'homme fatales, La Divines, schizophrenic idols, femme fatales… Wow! He could pick them all!

The jukebox, hemmed in the far back corner, was jumping with CANDY, CANDY, and a girlish flirt, her soft white hair cut like a boy's, was standing in front of it, twisting her enormous behind, he heavily plastic ringer fingers tapping the silvery railing of the music machine in tempo with the song.

"Hey, Judy!" came a voice out of the darkness, as Trag

pushed through the drunken mob and found a stool between two men. “Bring two more beets for two dears!”

“Queers, you mean!” the girl called Judy flung back, but laughing playfully, as she left the jukebox and went around the bar to get their drinks.

“Maybe this isn’t going to be so bad after all,” Trag said to himself, or thought to himself as he swung one muscular leg over the stool and say down. A dark-haired girl behind the bar came to him instantly and asked what he would have. He ordered a Gin Rickey. As he waited for the girl to fix his drink, he swiveled on the stool, took in the lounge from one end to the other, curiously, alerted, sizing up the place, every dark face peering dully out of the stygian shadows. Maybe Baton Rouge wasn’t so bad after all, he thought, once you get the hang of it. He admitted surprise that such a place existed in a capital town, and he awaited the evening with anticipation, with a kind of festive glee. There was action here… plenty of it, and as he thought this his eyes scanned the faces, noticing with a tinge of nervousness that some were young, good looking, promising, gullible!

The girl brought his drink, and Trag sat sipping it sparingly. He didn’t want to get to feeling too good too quick, or else all the fun would be spoiled for him. Just play it cool, babe, he said to himself.

Taking his barracks cap off, he lay it beside his drink on the bar. With a casual brush of his black hair with his fingers, it fell in wild ringlets down over his curious, black-lashed eyes, lending him an even more reckless air. His soft pink lips, smooth over clean white teeth, were provocative and captivating when he smiled, causing his dimples to sink deep, and the girls and queers to sigh.

The boy next to him tried to gain his attention with the age old declaration of: “How long you been overseas, Marine?”

It happened at every bar, wherever a marine happened to be. And Trag answered with tongue in cheek, as he had answered a thousand times before: “Two years.”

“Two years!” the boy came back, completely surprised, as Trag knew he would be. In Vietnam the duration, as everyone knew, or should know, was only one year, then the veteran was shipped to the states. “You must have been in some kind of special forces?”

Trag raked his eyes over him. Too sissy! He couldn’t go that crazy hair, those thronged sandals showing dirty toes and nails, that sweat shirt hanging like a maternity jacket over his stooped shoulders. He grunted.

“That’s about the size of it, Joe Blow. Special forces.”

“Bet they couldn’t do without you,” the boy said, lingering

with the conversation, hopeful of dragging it into something exceptional. His hot eyes played longingly over Trag's body, his face, his hair.

"That's right," Trag said icily. "They couldn't do without me."

The kid was persistent.

"Bet you got a lot of ribbons, the congressional medal maybe."

"Yeah." Trag slugged down his drink.

"Make the marines your career now… huh?"

Nothing but praise! Praise! Praise! This kid sure wanted his body bad. What a dreary come on!

"Might… might not."

The boy held up his empty glass.

"Can I buy you a drink… a hero's welcome?"

Trag glanced at him tiredly for a moment. Was he going to ruin his evening by having to converse with this high school fruit? But the kid's eyes looked on him so eagerly, so damned innocently.

So he said slowly, "Yes… go ahead."

The boy was all fire and spit and vinegar after that. When the drinks were delivered, he handed Trag his with triumphant bravado.

"Skoal," he murmured, all smiles, his lips cutting a broad girth from ear to ear.

"Skoal," Trag said, signing in complete and utter boredom. Was he ever that young?

"Do you know how the word skoal came about?" the boy asked, then as quickly apologized. "But of course you do, having gone around the world."

"Go ahead and tell me," Trag said sarcastically.

The boy grinned a know it all grin.

"Well," he stammered, now that he had the floor, "the term Skoal or Skal came from early Norse days. Warriors drank from the skalle or skull of a slain enemy, in a kind of victory toast. Today it is used as a toast to good health, prosperity."

"Bravo! Bravo! So you're educated," Trag said bluntly, his voice tinged with ice. This did little to dent the boy's elated spirit.

Trag caught him eyeing his crotch.

"Like what you see?"

"It's beautiful," the boy answered, readily, primed now with a boldness bordered on fearlessness. "You got a place to stay? You could go to my place. I got a pad down on…"

"Thanks, but no thanks!" Trag's voice was firm, which the boy instantly took for maliciousness. "The law might pick me up for contributing!"

The boy with a flush, slid off the stool and hurried for the door.

Fresh little bastard! Trag thought. Probably don't even have much to offer me. What gave him the idea I'd go with him?

CHAPTER 3

Dismissing the boy from his mind, Trag centered his attention on the jukebox which was raising the rooftop with the boisterous I CRIED LIKE A BABY. Two boys were standing in front of it, both were decked out in white corduroy hip huggers and Jarro boots, their hair bleached blond, their eyes dark with Cleopatra shadow. They were dancing the twist, without touching, which made it lawful.

Fags! Trag fumed.

He swiveled round on his stool and faced the bar. Someone else had taken the empty stool the gay high school kid had vacated.

"How you, Marine?" the new occupant said, and with so casual an air, without ostentation, that Trag felt immediately that he was going to like him. He allowed his gaze to go over him in a minute. Not bad looking either, he noticed, dark of complexion, black hair that was long and straight but tumbled in a bun above his pale blue eyes, slight of build, but hard, firm.

"Trying to make a night in this lousy town," Trag said, and tried to smile, but failed miserably.

"Then join the club," the boy remarked, ordering a beer.

Trag sat up at attention.

"You miserable, too?" he asked, though answered his own question.

"About as low as a snake's belly," the boy agreed, and though his lips remained firm over strong white teeth, his eyes fairly smiled. "Nothing to do here but drink... and you know, I hate drinking. That's why I stick to beer. When I'm in a mood like this, just one sip of the hard stuff and I get soused. Indian, you know?"

Trag gave him careful scrutiny.

"No, I didn't know, there's so many French people here in Louisiana equally dark, not to mention Cajuns and Coonasses and Cresoles and Malottos and Guardroons. My apologies if I've touched a sore spot."

"Now, what the hell do I care?" the boy next to him said. "You can call me anything for all I give a hoot," He thrust out a hand. "My name's Jesup Tangipahoa."

Trag caught Jesup's hand in his own, and he marveled at his grip. Long tapering fingers, the bones showing through the flesh. He realized instantly by that one shake that this Jesup could finish what he caught hold of. He told Jesup his name, and they smiled pleasantly at one another.

"Just call me Jess," he said, "like everybody else."

"Then Jess it is," Trag said, tipping his drink to his. He

started to say Skoal, but remembered the fruity kid and kept his silence. Then out of boredom asked, "What the hell do you do in this town to have a good time?”

"Drink yourself on your bottom,” Jess explained, his voice low, guttural. "That's all I've ever found to do. Hustle a little."

Trag lifted an eyebrow. He certainly did not look like a hustler, at least not like any hustler he had ever seen, utterly too masculine, and his curiosity mounted.

"I think your pulling my leg. You couldn t be a hustler."

Jess grinned, made circles on the bar with his beer.

"Well, I'm not pulling your leg. But maybe not the kind of hustler you think. I'm not queer if that's what you mean. But I've done a few things with men.”

"But you expect to get paid?”

Jess turned and eyed him seriously.

"Not always. That is, if I bump into somebody I like, then I'll go for nothing.”

Trag's curiosity became a thing almost fanatic.

"What kind of a man do you like?”

Jess remained silent for a moment, his head bowed. Then he said finally, “Oh, somebody like you, I guess, somebody you see and right off know you're going to like. You’re all man, I reckon, and a man's got to be all man if I fool with him... sexually, understand?”

Trag nodded that he did.

Now, this Jess was his cup of tea. Now that they had broken the ice, and Jess had lost no time in declaring himself, Trag, with boldness, began to study his features minutely, and the more he gazed the better liked what he saw.

"That's about the size of it for me," Trag explained, feeling free and comfortable in the presence of this sensuously dark person beside him. "If a man is going to swing on me, he's got to be all man."

“It's the only way I'd have it," Jess replied, leaning so that the staring bar maids could not hear. "That's where all the power lies, two real he men in bed coming on with each other. Nothing is more powerful than that and I mean nothinnnnng! It's a kind of strange force that causes you to lose your sense of logic and reasoning or something like that. You pull at each other like two magnets.” He laughed, shaking his dark head. "Boy! It's something! I just can't explain it, I reckon. Bur there's something about a man's body that haunts you and makes you do things you wouldn't think of doing before. Like I said, I ain't queer, but honest... I think a man's body is purtier than a woman’s."

“I'll buy that," Trag put in. "I’ve seen some good builds

in the marines. Boys as hard as rocks, and I m not ashamed to say it, but I enjoy a man working me over. I just can’t help it.”

“Any boy would enjoy it,” Jess said, “and I think every boy would go if it wasn’t for his fear of being called queer or strange. And I believe every boy wants to, in a way. In fact, I believe everybody can be made if it happens at the right time and at the right place. It's that male force seeking another male force, like two stallions sniffing at one another. Why, do you know something? I've even seen stallions do things that queers are always doing, honest! It's just something about a big guy that is fascinating! "

"You keep talking like that and I'll be so excited, I'll rape you," Trag said, giving the Indian the sex eye. Their gaze held for an instant, neither batting an eye lash, and something of this same magnetism Jess had spoken about hung between them, drawing, pulling one to the other.

The jukebox was going strong with FANTASY, a tune which was in accord with their emotions, the drink, and one intrinsic gaze could not drag itself from the other.

"Hell!” Trag finally whispered, sitting down his drink glass with a thump. “I’d give my seat in hell to drop my load tonight."

Jess gave him one fantastic look and said, "What you waiting for?"

Simultaneously, as if conjured, drawn, by some invisible force, they both got up from the swivel stools and made it through the mob to the door.

They found a room at the Traveler's Lodge on Lafayette Street. It was a blond brick affair with amber carriage lamps jutting out from the stones affronting each door, and elevated walkways crisscrossing from one apartment to the other. It was like something out of fantastic science fiction movie. They had one drink at the UNICORN lounge, which was a portion of the lodge, just so things wouldn't look too obvious and suspicious. Then they went up.

Once the key was turned in the lock, they both immediately began to strip. .While Jess took a shower, Trag sot on the edge of the bed naked and smoked a cigarette. He turned on the radio low, and soft, melancholy music drifted up to fill the room.

CHAPTER 4

After what seemed to Trag an eternity, Jess came out of the shower and stood in the middle of the room drying himself. He was not in the least bashful, Trag noticed with pleasure. He eyed him as he ran the white fluffy towel over his dark, satin-like frame. For some reason, he looked larger naked, muscular, where in loose clothing he looked a little too trim too boney. But the fine bones showed through his layer of hard muscle, at the knee, the ankles, the long beautiful feet, the wrists, the elbows, and he was flat of stomach, narrow of hip, and there was no unattractive body hair to take away from his deeply masculine looks... except at his crotch, and there it curled in a black, wiry nest from which his proud power became the apex of his complete body, while he moved and pivoted his body in drying himself off.

When Jess was through, he came closer to the bed, and the yellow glow of the bed-lamps bathed his dark skin until it glowed like molten amber. It was then that Trag had the opportunity to really study his male parts as he loved to study them.

"I like your build," Jess said, flinging the towel across a yellow Queen Anne chair and lighting a cigarette from Trag's which lay on the bed table.

"Kinda go for yours, too," Trag praised, devouring his hard savage with eyes that hungrily would never have enough looking. It was the one thing of which his gaze never tired... looking and admiring a beautiful body. Jess's sent wild tremors through him, and his gaze locked on his groin, where his flesh swung like the pendulum of a clock, like a stallion's. In full heat. Right now, this Indian boy was rigid with lustful desire and need.

"But I got plenty of scars," Jess said, moving to the light and pointing out silvery indentures on his ankle, his knee, up his left thigh, and across his biceps. "Used to live on a horse farm in Brookhaven, Mississippi. Used to break horses for a living, that is till Ma and Pa died. I was only about fourteen then, had to start shifting for myself. I use to fight all the time too, but like all Indians I heal quick."

"I didn't know that," Trag said with a trembling voice, his gaze still glued to Jess's wonderfully hard body.

"Yeah, when Indians get wounded they don't eat nor drink, just sleep… sleep until they get well. That's the way I do, kind of hypnotize myself. I wouldn't fight except when I drink." He laughed shyly. "But you know the old saying... crazy drunk injun!"

"You like to get drunk and fight?" Trag asked, baiting him with conversation, before they got down to real business, which he knew they would do sooner or later.

"Well, when I drink I usually fight, and when I don't drink I don't fight. Reckon one calls for the other. But I'd heap rather fool around than fight and drink put together, hadn't you?"

This seemed to be the cue and Trag said yes readily.

Reaching down, Jess caught him.

"You sure got a baby maker there," he said, and his voice too trembled. He began to fondle him back and forth, playfully.

Suddenly, a wild tremor shot through Trag's every vein, and laying back on the soft bed, he lifted his thighs, then spread them invitingly.

Jess slumped down on the bed near his legs and began to do things with his hand, up and down, slow at first, then maddeningly.

"Like that?" he asked, moving his hand slower now, teasing him with his long tapering fingers, sticking his little finger into the most delicate parts, then sliding it down to the mat of dark hair around Trag's groin.

"I'm going to go off too quick," Trag whispered, and with a slight whimper in his voice. "It feels too good... too good!"

Bending down between Trag's uplifted thighs, and cupping Trag's pelvis in both his long strong hands, Jess slipped his mouth down and started to kiss him. His lips went all the way around, doing all sorts of maddening things to him to make him scream with tension. Sounds, deep and guttural came from Jess's lips, and at times he let out whimpering cries like a savage animal.

Again and again, in sometimes rapid then slower functions, Jess pumped Trag's body with his mouth, never faltering, never relenting, but keeping pace with his initial rhythm, taking in his mouth, down to the opening of his throat, every fathom of Trag's length, up, down, up down, with the regularity of clockwork.

Thrilled beyond gauging, Trag lifted and pivoted his groin, reveling in the sensuous touch of Jess's warm grips on his body, intoxicated by his hot mouth pursed over the target, the throbbing and swelling matching in rigidity and contour the shape of Jess's mouth, one swelling, the other pursing, so that both would fit, flesh in flesh, moving and pulsating like a piston in warm oil.

Finally, it was too much. Trag let out contented sighs, little childish shrills, wiggled his pelvis madly, as he erupted in a series of gasps and back-breaking spasms and eruptions.

CHAPTER 5

Jessup swallowed down his breath as if it was nectar, the veins along his long, graceful neck standing out like strung wires. His face went crimson, and he still clung to Trag with one hand while he kept on hugging and kissing. When he had had his fill, he let go, and then he played around and teased the stud marine, making him laugh with ecstasy. In reality, this really felt good. It was the very best.

Finally, he let go and sat up between Trag's uplifted thighs. "That was great," he said, his blue eyes hot and sparkling.

Trag shifted his position, propping his head up on the two stacked pillows. “You sure know now to work over a guy,” he said with genuine praise. "It's the best I’ve ever had.”

Jesup tried to grin, but a little sheepishly. "I ought to be good at it. I've had enough practice."

Trag eyed him suspiciously, not believing his ears. "I just can't imagine you making the scene with a man," he said, admiring his terrific build, his hard masculinity, the savagery of his person. "You just don't look the queer type."

Jesup turned his head away then, stared absently at the opposite wall, as if he saw something other than a painting of a magnolia blossom cut and lying in a field of moss.

"I've done a lot of things since ma and pa died," he began sadly, his voice worlds and worlds away, distant, remote, stirring with emotion and strife. "I had to make a living somehow, and this seemed the easiest, or, the only trade I could be good of at my age. When you haven't finished school, backward, ignorant like me, with no one to guide you or give a damn where you live or die, you'll do most anything."

Trag looked at him earnestly, a little saddened by this boy he had liked immediately, and felt now they had known each other a long time. "You hate doing it... don't you?”

Jesup turned his head and looked at him through his mass of black, tangled hair.

“Naw... ah... at first I felt ashamed of it, kept thinking I was queer or something, but I got use to it. I figured if I did it for money then it wasn't queer.” He shrugged. "So I kept telling myself this so much I finally believed it myself, I reckon."

"You expect me to pay you for tonight?”

"Naw, Trag, I enjoyed it... honest. You got a big body, just like I like. You also get a big kick out of it all. You seem to enjoy it so much that it makes me enjoy it. I can’t stand for a guy to just lay back while I work my head off trying

to get it. I like for a guy to pitch in and wiggle like you do. We make a good team."

"But I will pay you, Jess, if you want me to, need the money... will be glad to."

"Naw! I got a few bucks on me. If I can make ten a day I'm plenty happy. That pays for my food and smokes, and an old man down on Florida Avenue gives me a room to stay in. It ain't much, but it'll do for me. I don t stay in much anyway. Like to be out, under the sky, ramble. Too, I usually stay with the guy's I score with. I flatly refuse to take a guy in a bathroom or in a dark park somewhere or in a parked car... too damned dangerous. Besides, it does look queer like that, don't you think?" Trag nodded. "Groping a man or have him grope me in a men's room. I hate the thought of it. It's got to be in a room with the door locked or nothing with me."

"I don't blame you," Trag agreed. "I hate queers who prowl the public toilets and on street corners and so cowardly they try to make it with you from a moving car. Too, I like for both parties to be naked."

"There you go," Jesup said, laughing a hearty laugh. He lit a cigarette then obediently lit one for Trag. "That's what makes sex good, being naked. That way, you can really get to see a guy, his build, the power of him. I love smooth skin, but with hard muscle beneath it. It's got to be a beautiful body with me… or I won't go."

Trag took a draw from his cigarette and watched Jesup thoroughly out of his fully awoke gaze. "Bet you get tired of all the stuff, though," he said thoughtfully, deeply concerned for his newly found friend and sex companion, "It would worry the hell outa me."

"Oh, at first," Jesup said with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "I'd take on anybody then. Now, don't get me wrong. I make most of my money with some guy working me over, not me on his. But in this trade you have to do a heap of things you're not proud of afterwards, and the best way to beat it is to not think about it. Once you start thinking then you're down under, man... way down. Like I said, I just do it for the money, and let it go at that, like I was selling beef or something. That is, except with a guy like you. Then, I realty enjoy it, honest. I could fool with you all night and still enjoy every minute of it. I don't know, just how to explain it." He stopped talking for a moment and, pulling his legs up on the bed, held them by the ankles. Beneath his smooth thighs Trag got a good look of his male physique and pride, glowingly warm in the semidarkness, dangling in the shadows of his huge, melon-tike thighs, at the patch of black hair, and he swallowed hard.

"About the only way I can explain it," Jesup went on, "is

that when I'm fooling with a guy, taking him all the way, I get the feeling it is making me strong, that all his strength is pouring from his body into mine. And I guess thinking like that makes it work, or it does for me. I feel so strong right now I could life the top off this room and toss it into the river."

He turned his deliberate gaze on Trag then, took one puff from his cigarette and went on. "Is that the way you feel?"

Trag looked at him abashed, gutted with question. "I've never taken on a guy like you did to me," he answered readily, but without hostility. He was merely stating a fact.

Jesup looked at him as if he had been struck. "Oh," he murmured lowly, almost in a whisper. "I didn't know. I guess I just took it for granted that you had."

"Don't get me wrong, Jess," Trag tried to explain. "It's not that I feel I'm too good to do it, or something like that. It's just that the opportunity has never arisen. Well, what I'm trying to say is that I've never met a guy I thought I would like to take on."

There was a deep silence tor a moment, only the low murmuring of the radio pouring up into the still, air-conditioned room.

"Do you think you'd like to try me?" Jesup suggested, not looking in Trag's direction. "As a starter... I mean?"

Trag thought for a moment.

"I think if I have ever considered taking a man it's been you."

"Good... I like that about you," Jesup said, standing up. He then stood directly in front of Trag, his legs spread slightly, his hands on both hips. "Look it over for a while," he suggested. "And, if you like what you see, then take it a little at a time, get used to it. I'll go along with whatever you do. Just let my body be yours to experiment on with. I'm all man, and it's the best way for the first time if you take a real man, for after that you won't ever be satisfied with anything less."

Trag immediately sat up, snuffed out his cigarette and sat on the edge of the bed. With his elbows resting on his knees, he leaned slightly forward, his gaze intrinsic, locked, his brain reeling on thoughts and desires which had never confronted his thought before.

Jesup's huge power dangled now about six inches from Trag's face. He devoured its dark beauty with eyes starved for passion.

From that savage nest of flesh, of dangling sex pulsating and growing before him, Trag got a sensuous intake of its masculine smell. The scent was so strong it raided his mind, embalmed senses of logic, and every vein in his body throbbed to a full pulse.

Under Jesup s caress, his body had grown now to elephantine

proportions, thrust out semi-hard on inch in front of Trag's lips. At the sight of it, a monster of sex, a deadly serpent pent on robbing him of all manliness, of honor, of decency, its poisonous sperm aimed at him, all his marine-taught convictions, sweat popped out on his forehead, and he trembled like a thief.

"Just take your time," Jesup said in a level voice, a whisper really, a voice so low it came up from the deepest recesses of his guts. He started to twist his loins and spread his legs a little more. "Put your hands down here, first, get the feel, then work up."

Silently Trag obeyed. He lifted them slightly, gauging their enormous weight, pressed his fingers into them to devour, with his touch, their sponginess. They were so warm, so glowing to his mere touch he felt they boiled within with some liquid fire, and he could feel the network of veins rolling and curling in his fingers.

CHAPTER 6

As he trembled nervously within, his knees like water, he automatically let his hand wander, up into the nest of thick wool, in and through it, felt the tautness of hard sinewy muscle beneath the satin sheen of his skin.

"Easy now, just take your time," Jesup said soothingly, noticing Trag's tremor, his nervous fingers playing out the length of his erect and pulsating physique, doing all sorts of bizarre things to him to make him grow and scream with arousal.

Jesup s power now, ever growing steadily, was almost to Trag's lips now and, unable to control his nerves, his pent up desires, he instinctively thrust out his tongue. Then, leaning a little further, he cupped his lips over the opening, then slowly up, up, and over where he pressed lovingly.

"Easy, boy! Easy." Jesup whispered. Enjoy it a bit at a time. Don't waste it all at once. But it feels good! Good! Good!"

His muscular physique was hard and enormously rigid now. He surrendered himself completely to Trag's groping mouth. He could no longer control himself. The sight of that long bronzed and developed body coming doggedly toward him from its cave of matted hair, the huge thighs rolling wantonly in their crotch sling, the spread legs, the flat stomach all was too much on his nerves. He began to kiss and love up with complete abandon, enjoying it so much he went at it as if he was going to never get enough.

"It's good! good! good!" Jesup kept saying, his voice in cadence to Trag's mouth as he went back and forth. His lips made a wet trail, and Jesup's physique shone in the half-light like a marble statue in the moonlight. Now, Trag was taking all of it, burying his face completely in the sheer ecstasy of the young man, and as he pushed forward with his gaping mouth Jesup hunched, one meeting the other head on. There was a mild slushing sound, like waves against a sandy shore. Moisture dripped from Trag's mouth and onto the carpet.

Instinctively, like animals now wrapt in nothing but the doing, Trag had pulled Jesup to the bed. Now he lay on his back, his huge velvety thighs raised invitingly. Trag was down over him, never letting his hard body go for an instant, but riding up and down with his opened mouth, his hands firm and wanton on Jesup's quivering backside.

Making love to this dark, savage Indian was a hungriness Trag was unable to satisfy within himself. The more he hunched, the more he slid up and down over the enormous hard-muscled physique, the more he longed for it. He began to let out little

pitiful cries, desperate cries, in his gasping, sexual search for satisfaction.

Jesup, with his groin going up and down steadily in relation to Trag's mouth, his hands holding Trag's head warmly, caressingly, they both began to squeal and cry out as the little pangs of ecstasy shot through their every nerve, from the nerve center of their loins and to every parts of their body. They became, in their sexual union, as one animal, a creature seeding and being fed by itself. Trag clung to Jesup's loins helplessly, desperately, locked to him by his persistent mouth on his very source of manhood. His mouth the lock, Jesup's body the key. He realized instinctively they would go on like this, pivoting and struggling in the throes of ecstasy until both had erupted. Their savage squeals advertised this, foreordained it, spoke of it in their immediate future.

They were wild now in the giving and the taking, Trag s hot, pulsating lips drawing out the ecstasy in Jesup’s sinewy body. In their wildness they flung everything to the abandonment of reserve, leaving nothing of themselves but their sexual, bodily craves, which they were fanatically taking out on the other. They held to one another, gripped in an emotion as old as legacy. The pitch and sway of their naked bodies on the wrinkled sheets looked as if they were battling to the death, as if one was trying to devour the other in a form of unity as old as time.

“I'm coming! I’m coming!" Jesup half-screamed, letting out shrill sighs, as he worked his body into a livid sweat.

In that same instant Trag felt a tremor running through his entire frame. Every part of himself was now rigid with desire. He tried to cough, but couldn't and he swallowed in one gulp. The two of them kept on and on as if every sinew and every muscle would erupt with a passion borne out of raw lust.

Each time Jesup lifted his pelvis with a rigid, taut thrust, more desire shot hotly. They both clung to one another with a ferocity that was animalistic and depraved. It kept on, one eruption upon another, as Jesup squealed, panted, sighed, his wiggling body a shiny orb of sweat and passion.

Finally, with each thrust of his hard-muscled physique, a little less intense than the one before, Jesup relapsed into a limp heap, his arms spread eagle, his thighs spreading loosely, like the wings of a dying swan.

Still holding onto Jesup's undulating physique, siphoning into his lungs every drop of the precious power, Trag held him with one sweaty hand, while he kept on doing more and more things to him in on effort to make him grow rigid with desire. He wanted to arouse him again and again for more and more and more.

"Whew! You got it, baby," said Jesup with a tired, contented sigh. He stroked Trag's face, wound his fingers down around his lips where he still groped his body lovingly, desperately.

"I've got to have more! More! Please!" Trag begged, pleaded, "This is just the start of it all. Now that you have made me so excited, you have to give me more or else I'll just go out of my mind. I just have to have it — hear me?" He was enraged and filled with lust crazed desire.

Jesup pulled up tightly around Trag's face, and a moment more, he had turned Trag over on his back. Now he was on top of him, on his knees and hands like a horse.

Trag reached up, wound his arms around Jesup's behind, and with another hard on, Jesup began to move closer to his mouth, hunching up and down desperately, looking down through his spread arms at Trag's face buried up in his thighs, his mouth gaped to its full width, his chin lost in the target of his most crazed desire.

Their bodies poured off sweat now, streams dripping around the shining contours and planes and wetting the sheets in pools of moisture.

Jesup's enormous power, lovingly warm, lay in the hollow of Trag's neck. He loved their caressing touch as they slid up and down in unison with Jesup's hunching, driving force. Submerged in the hot depths of this savage, this blanket of dark olive flesh, the male smell, the glory of the male, Trag basked in the dark, primitive beauty of it.

For the first time in his life, he was partaking of sex in the fashion he had dreamed it, longed for it, without knowing he was dreaming or longing. Before, he had considered this normal route to be a thing apart from man and his desires, a taint on his true nature. But now, engulfed in the sexual throes of this savage, sucking out his strength, drinking the best that was in him, he knew instinctively and thoroughly that he had discovered his medium.

Each downward thrust of Jesup's fine, sinewy body, burying his face, his world, in a mass of wild hair, filling his mouth to the very tip of his lungs with the maddening length of his enormous meat, being lolled by his huge strength flowing warmly over him, he knew profoundly for what he was intended, for what he had been born.

Strangely, he and this half breed Indian, as if fate had settled their lives for them, had met, and had joined in a sexual union that knew no bounds. And he knew they were meant for each other, knew their paths had to cross, had crossed, and that somehow they would remain together in the future.

They were male and male, met and strangely united as though

two savage animals in a dark wilderness, giving to one another a force equal in quality and tone, playing out the beautiful rhythms of their beautifully proportioned bodies against the tune of the other's body, the mettle of one being forged into the mettle of the other. This strange magnetic power, this invisible force of which Jesup had earlier spoken, had come between them tonight, magnetic and provocative and overwhelmingly. Nothing, ever, would have the strength nor the will to pull them apart.

Knowing this, thinking this, embalmed and drunk on it, Trag gave all he possessed with his hungry mouth, hopeful that he could thrill Jesup above and beyond all thrills. Every time Jesup lowered his body down over his face, burying him in his male glory, Trag wished they would keep this up forever, that this night would never end, that nothing, not even Satan, could unlock them from this terrible passion which was holding them both prisoner for life.

So they went on and on, Jesup's body moving with the regular push and pull of a piston in a machine. Pouring from their gyrating bodies, sweat came in wild streams, and slushing sounds as well as the sloshing of wet flesh against wet flesh mingled with their groans and squeals.

Finally, Jesup's buttocks went turgid, tightening as hard as melons, and he made a luscious plunge into Trag's face.

"It's yours... baby!" he sighed painfully, out of breath.

Again as before, Trag felt and welcomed the molten response as the two of them now clung to one another seeking out greater and greater heights of sheer ecstasy. Jesup's body went limp, until his body sagged down over Trag's face, burying him in glorious, hot flesh.

For a while they both lay limp, weary, fatigued, breathing heavily, each breath a pant, a reprieve from the rapture both had experienced. Then Jesup turned over on his back and pulled Trag up and onto the pillow beside him. He lit two cigarettes and handed Trag one of them.

They lay for a quiet moment, not speaking, both enjoying their cigarettes and the ecstasy of memory.

Outside, the honking of car horns and the hollow intonations of the ships' horns in the harbor moved up ghostlike and invaded their silence. With it the occasional laugh of someone down in the cocktail lounge, the hoarse growls of a drunk, the maddening tunes on the jukebox. A train went by, and the sound of its whistle was ominous and frightening and lonely as it hurled its way through the night.

CHAPTER 7

Jesup coughed then, turning on his left side, looked at Trag lying beside him.

"Well… how did you like it?" he asked, blowing a ring of blue smoke from his mouth. It lazily climbed to the ceiling, growing larger as it went, then broke into cloudy fragments.

"It was wonderful," Trag answered, and with profound honesty. "I've never had any like it." He lay and thought of it in his mind. The memory of it was almost as wonderful as the actual doing.

"I'm glad," Jesup murmured. "We sure hit it off nicely."

"I know," Trag whispered reverently, letting out a contented sigh. "That force you were talking about."

"It never fails... when two real he-men get together," Jesup confirmed. "It kinda makes you go crazy in the head, doesn't it?"

"Yeah," Trag agreed, shaking his head. "It's something you just can't let go of, like starving for something which can never fill you up. You just keep on eating and eating but never get full."

They stopped talking then and finished their cigarettes in mute silence. The dim golden lights from the bed tables illuminated their naked bodies against the silvery white of the wrinkled sheets. They were beautiful in their relaxed attitudes, their thighs touching, Trag's toes on his right foot mingled lovingly with the toes on Jesup's left foot.

"Hate to see daylight come," Jesup said. His voice was deep and guttural, almost a tremor of a voice, or a sad memory of a voice.

"Me, too," Trag said, and his voice was equally primed with passion and regret. Dawn always made sex partners strangers, seemingly. He did not want to see Jesup become a stranger, to leave this room, which suddenly had become a kind of retreated Paradise, and go off into the cold, hostile streets to someone else, to some other guy he would do the same thing with tomorrow night.

He hoped Jesup was thinking the same things about him, but he dared not put such inward, heartfelt feelings into words. That would make it sound all the more queer. He did not want to think him and Jesup, or what they did together, as being queer. It was something else. What it was, he could not pin a title to, but something stronger and more worth while, more demanding of mind and heart as much as of the body. So he said instead, in a manner to keep their thoughts on the physical, "You sure can show a guy a red hot time!"

"It's cause I give it all I got," Jesup answered gravely, turning his dark face to look at him. "I want you to enjoy it. Oh, with some guys I don't even get excited, some of them when their drunk don't know the difference anyway, but with you, Trag, since this was your first go at this kind of tooling around, I wanted to make you enjoy it."

"Why?" Trag asked, puzzled.

"So you'd want to go at me again."

"Is that important to you... having ME take you ?"

"Hell yes it's important," Jesup said in a quandary. "I like you, Trag. You're a real man. I ain't run across anybody like you in a long time, not since I was in Angola."

"Where's that?"

"Prison, man... the university."

Trag raised up on one elbow and stared him squarely in the eyes. "You were in prison?"

Jesup gulped, stared at the ceiling. "Oh it wasn't no Mickey Mouse thing. Got into a little trouble when I was around seventeen. Simple burglary."

"How long did you stay in?"

"Oh, about a year," Jesup said, with reluctance. "But I got out on good behavior, never got in a fight once, not once. I hated that joint, honest. It gave me the creeps. All that sex crap that went on in there."

Trag asked curiously, "What kind of sex crap?"

"Guys with their boy-girls, just like having a girl."

"You mean that went on in prison? What about the men who guarded you? The warden?"

"Oh, hell, they could care less," said Jesup with a tinge of bitterness in his voice.

"They think it's best if a man has his special girlboy. Some of the men, especially the older men, work better if they have a girlboy to shack up with. Course those kids are green, especially when they first go in. If they're good looking some older man is going to latch on them for sure. Turn them into punks. "

"But how do they get a chance to do, er take each other?" Trag questioned out of avid curiosity, realizing how utterly impossible for anything like that to go on in the marines, with the tight disciplining and the lack of privacy. "Don't you have guards at all times watching over your cells?"

"They don't have cells at this prison," Jesup explained. "They have barracks, just like in the service. So many men to each dormitory, And they do it at night when the lights are out. I use to lay in my bunk and watch them, made me sick, wanted to vomit up, men treating boys like they were beautiful girls, fighting over them, jealous as all get out, even killing over

them. Them ratty punks, putting out their bottoms like little crabby whores and liking it, man! I never fooled around with them, but I heard some of them could do it better than a woman, that you could get hold of them and never hurt them at all. And funny thing, too, those kids who let a man take them were all small, like girls, even though they didn't act like girls."

"What about the other things? You know. Bet that went on plenty, too?"

"Well, you could use a punk like a girl and nobody at the UNIVERSITY considered it queer, but if a guy wanted to do it the other way, he was run off to the camps in the cotton fields. We didn't allow those types of queers to live in the barracks."

"But what's the difference?"

Jesup shook his head. "Damned if I know. Some men just like to take a purty boy like a girl and don't think it queer... like the Greeks."

Trag thought for a moment. "Is that how you got started, in prison I mean?"

Jesup was silent for a moment. He lit another cigarette, and turned back on his backside.

"Bout the size of it, I guess," he finally answered, as if he was making a confession. "Don't get me wrong. I ain't turned into a punk. No man there ever used me like a girl, and ain't none going to. I draw the line there. It ain't that I can't stand the pain. I can stand as much pain as anybody, it's just that I don't like being used like a damned whorey woman. I ain't built like a woman and I ain't going to pretend that I am, not for no man. But I met this guy in there, see?"

He paused, stared absently at the heavily draped windows, as if he longed to leap through and into freedom, that memories of that awesome sojourn in prison was too much for his nerves to bear, and he yearned to leap free.

"He was a big son of a bitch, and handsome. Looked like that guy who plays Cheyenne Bodie on TV. Black hair, a giant, man, with black hair all over his body, and built like a farm mule. Anyway I worked in the hospital as an intern, and one day he came in for a physical examination. And boy, when I saw that guy naked I flipped. I ain't never seen a man as big as that one. Honest! I ain't never seen the likes before or since. I couldn't keep my eyes off him. He was the most man I had ever seen, and I guess he noticed me looking and thought I was a gay boy. Anyway, he worked the projector in the movie house, and he asked me to come over that night. I went, man. And I got down and went right to work on him all the time the show was going on, I won't ever forget the name of that movie. It was Captain From Castilie, and there was the purtiest background music I ever heard, a march or something, and all the time that music

was playing I was making the scene with that big guy. Damn it, the best guy I ever did see or have... until you."

They both laughed at this, and Jesup continued triumphantly, "It was every night after that. Nobody knew or suspected that two studs like me and him were making it together. And if they did suspect they would have been afraid to mention it to him, for he'd sure mop up the floor with them. I saw him pick up the back of a truck one day, and he even lifted it out of a ditch. Man, was he a man! He told me time after time that no man was ever built as big as he was, and I believed him. He almost choked me to death, but you know, that guy was as gentle as a lamb. I never will forget how he held my head in between his huge hands while I made the scene with him. They were so warm and soft, but when he got mad at somebody they could turn into weapons of steel."

He stopped talking for a moment, blinked his eyes, then went on, "I wonder where that rascal is now, tonight. Wonder if somebody else is swinging on that big body of his?"

CHAPTER 8

So Jesup cared, too, Trag said to himself, realizing with a tinge of inner happiness that he was not the stranger who would become cold and hostile at dawn, as so many sex partners do when the sexual charade is over and spent. Jesup liked people, as he liked people.

"Next to his, Trag, you are the biggest I've ever seen," Jesup said, turning hot eyes to face him. He reached down, caught him in his hands, and fondled him playfully. "You throb like a bird trying to get loose," he said nervously running his thumb over. Then he fondled the mass of black hair, played with Trag's belly, the ease of slight of hand, turned him over on his stomach. Allowing his hand to roam freely, he caressed Trag's inner thighs, ran his fingers up to his behind, pressed firmly on each cheek, then thrust his finger where it was really felt.

"I knew a kid once who was a queer lover," he said lowly, all the while caressing Trag's backside. "Never wanted sex, wouldn't touch you anywhere else, just wanted to pick at you, like a monkey picking fleas. He was a mute, deaf and dumb, and once he got hold of your bottom, he wouldn't let go. Since you couldn't make him understand that you didn't like his fooling around, he'd pick your bottom raw unless you did like I had to do, boot him in the behind."

He stopped talking, swallowing hard. "You got a fine bottom, Trag," he said with genuine praise, allowing his warm hands to go over Trag's buttocks, down into the beautiful hollow of his thighs. "I knew a boy once, a female impersonator, who liked to get his kicks by working a guy down there. I used to live with her. One time I stepped out on her, took a real girl, and he blew his top. Went out and got dog drunk and came in at dawn bragging about having a guy. All of a sudden he fell on the bed where I was and started crying and begging me to forgive her — him. Then he started kissing me. But the fact that he went out with a guy sort of changed it for me. I couldn't get excited over him again. I just can't understand it but I knew that I couldn't go for that. I kicked the hell out of him. Spent five days in jail for it, but it was worth it. I haven't been able to stand faggots since. I pick em now like you and that guy in the University. My, but you got a body built for real good use."

"I've never been had that way," Trag confessed, loving Jesup's warm hands on his tired sexually fatigued body. "I'm a virgin."

"That will make you all the more enjoyable," Jesup declared, running his fingers into the soft crevice.

"I'm afraid you'll hurt me," Trag said, a tremor.

"Naw," Jesup replied, sticking his index finger far up into Trag's rectum. "You won't feel a thing. I know what and how to do it. What do you say? I wouldn't hurt you for anything, you know that."

The soft, lovable sounds of Jesup's voice went over him like warm oil, and somehow, intoxicated by it, his warm hands, he could not refuse.

"Go ahead," he said before he thought, and his body stiffened at the thought of this savage person taking him.

"Just relax, man, relax," Jesup suggested, patting him on the ass. "You won't feel a thing… if you'll just relax."

Trag tried to let his body go, as Jesup got on his knees and pulled Trag's legs apart. Then he hovered slowly down over him, his chest touching Trag's back first, then his belly, then the sharp penetration as he instinctively found his target. Jesup then, folding Trag's shoulders and neck in his strong dark arms, gave a slow, deliberate thrust.

Trag felt the slow and steady penetration and, knowing how enormous it was, conjured a picture of it sliding, like a blind serpent, into a dark hollow cave, creeping on its soft belly until it reached the deepest recesses of his body, groping blindly, groping savagely until it could go no deeper.

As it went in, hard and dark and painful, it ploughed ahead, eyeless and fathomless, struck nerve upon nerve, each shooting like lightning to every portion of his taut body, even to his fingertips and toes, and he let out a muffled sob.

"Relax, baby, relax," Jesup cried hoarsely, trying to sooth him, as he moved his own body up and down lovingly, seemingly without passion and want, but only to please him.

Automatically, and surprisingly, Trag let his whole body go limp, and the pain left him robed in balm and peace. The slicing of his core by Jesup's hard power of lust and love felt ominously sweet to him now, something vitally essential and demanding, and he lay and basked in the loveliness of it plowing into him, withdrawing sensuously then ploughing in again, each thrust digging a little deeper, each forward plunge cutting a dark cave into the flesh roads of his belly.

Trag loved, and without precedent, every lunge of Jesup's power into his body, hopeful that he was giving to him, in giving his body, something he would continue to want, not just this one night, but all the nights in their future. Like a woman who gives her body with her love to the mate of her choice, so was he becoming the woman to whom Jesup had chosen to mate.

At first, after Jesup had mounted him, his huge thighs going wantonly over his, he had moved his body up and down very slowly, almost reluctantly, perhaps so that Trag could get accustomed to the feel of the weight and force of his thrusts,

but now with regularity he began to become abandoned in his concern. His huge arms, corded with thick veins and muscle, gripped his shoulders and neck in a vice-like grip, and his huge, savage body began to cut its way into him, unmercifully, digging, gouging with his enormous lust, churning his lust into a slick mass of sweat and passion. Under his terrific force, his weight, his rampant maneuverings, the whole bed shook like a raft on a wind tossed sea. Trag, pinned in beneath, gloried in this savagery, this physical charade of male taking male.

In the sweet, honey-like ecstasy, he pivoted and swayed his own pelvis in unison with Jesup's movements, thrusting upwards the very moment when Jesup thrust downwards, and the enormous body gushed and foamed and made loud noises as he worked itself up and down in Trag's body.

Jesup became a thing wild and undisciplined now. An animal in the throes of procreation, playing out his male role as Trag played out that of female, letting out animal groans, cries, his breath heaving, hot on Trag s neck, as he worked up his sperm to a boiling crescendo. And the more he lunged, breaking the bed into a thing of tremor and rattle, the more he tightened his grip on Trag, clinging to him like a man clinging to a cliff, grinding with his power, determined to conquer going deeper, deeper, deeper.

Then as he made a terrific lunge spreading his legs as wide as he could spread them every nerve, every vein, every muscle grown taut, rigid, hard as iron, he felt the peak of his raw lust. As his urges erupted and ran in wild relentless streams, echoing ecstasy and profound rapture, he let out rasping cries, bit at Trag's soft neck, tore away the flesh. Again and again he hunched downward with all the carnal force in his body, each time spouting loads of molten nectar, rolling his body, hunching up, down, sideways, working desperately to pull from the deepest recess of his own body the last bits of desire which he was desperately bent on giving to Trag.

And Trag, wrapped in the glorious mansion of Jesup, felt the hot liquid spread in his body with gushes upon gush, felt Jesup's body sliding in and out with more freedom now, less friction, as if became bathed in its own heat.

For a timeless era, Jesup continued to lay sprawled over Trag's body, relishing the feel of warm flesh when passion is fled. He kissed away the wounds where he had bitten into Trag's neck, and hugged him close, warmly, profoundly.

"Wowie! But you were fine," he whispered at last, turning his body slightly to one side so that he could rub the long smooth plains of Trag's hips, the roundness of his right cheek. Though he was still closed within him, his great power had ebbed now to frothiness, lathered and numb. His dimensions diminished

so that Trag hardly felt it within him, only slightly, lovingly, and he gloried that he was still there, as though an intricate and compelling part of him.

"I guess we're turning fruit," Trag murmured, daring not to shift his position, daring not to arouse himself enough that their glowing mood would be robbed.

"Don't talk about it," Jesup said, as if in warning. "Let s just do it when we want to, and to hell with what it looks like."

Finally, they broke away from each other, and lay back on the bed, their head resting on the same pillow.

"I've gone too far in life now to look back and start wondering what I've become," Jesup explained, sighing heavily, as if, through some phases of his existence, he had a few regrets. "I've had some hell of good times, and some rough ones, and the rough I've tried to forget and the good times I'll always remember. It ain't much to hang onto. But I can't forget guys like Cheyenne in prison, nor you. Tomorrow, Trag, I won't forget you."

"I hope not," Trag said, and with truth. "Does there ever have to be a tomorrow?" he asked out of reason and doubt, dreading the future now, now that he had known Jesup, and relishing the past.

"No," Jesup said lowly, sadly. "I wish it could go on and on, without ever ending, but I reckon it can't. It never does, not for me anyway. That's why I hate this life. It s… it's so... final."

"It don't have to be," Trag put in wildly. "Two people who get together and enjoy what they do, it don't necessarily have to end. It could go on."

"It could, but it don't. It never does. You get hot, you have sex, you make love, do all the things people do who are madly in love, and at daylight you shake hands and say goodbye like it all has meant nothing."

"But... but if two people agreed that it would go on...?"

"I don't know, " Jesup sighed. He lit two cigarettes, thrust one between Trag's lips, this time very lovingly. "In my field, in my trade, you never let yourself get hung up on one guy. It don't pay. I don't mean with cabbage, man, but with the heart and the mind. Not that I wouldn't like to find me someone very manly whom I could shack up with regularly, get to really liking each other. But where in the hell are they? Just one night stands. One night stands!"

CHAPTER 9

Trag lay and listened to this truthful speaking half-breed and concluded how right he was and how wrong was the world. He too had needed someone for a long time, not just a close friend like Ted Brenson, just another buddy marine, but someone close enough to have sex and to understand with, someone you could cling to during your moments of loneliness and could depend on when things got tough.

"Sometimes I wonder how I got started at all this," Jesup kept rambling on, as Trag listened quietly. "One day I was a green kid and the next in the know, going to bed with men instead of girls, talking and bragging about girls when I really wanted a guy. Never forget the first time I had sex with a boy. Was back in Brookhaven. We were tussling in a cotton crib. This boy, this Bradford, was wearing rotten jeans, and they ripped all the way down one leg. I could see his shining white thigh through the tear and the hair sticking out around his crotch. I got sick at my belly, I got so hot for him. He played possum after that, falling back on the hot cotton, pouring with sweat. I got up enough nerve to lift the torn place and look at what he had. I just couldn't control myself. I mean, just the sight of it made me go all wild and hot. Before I knew it, I grabbed hold of it and began to play with him like mad. He groaned, snored like he was asleep, though I knew damned well he was awake all the time, but I kept on playing with him. The next day we went back to the cotton crib and the same thing happened again. He said that he was tired and sleepy and wanted to take a nap. I unbuttoned his pants when he started snoring, and played with him until dark. It was my first look at it. He didn't hold back. He went all the way. That was when I realized then I had to do something else with him. The next day I kissed him with my mouth and he snored so loud you could hear him for a mile. After that, we kept up our little games until about a year. It sure was good. That is, until I went down to New Orleans to work at my uncle's filling station."

He stopped talking, wiped his eyes, sniffed, then went on. "My uncle, my daddy's brother, treated me like hell! Never let me off a single day, and I had to sleep on a little cot in the back of the station, smelled like hell. He tried to play with me one night when he came in drunk, and I up and left for good."

Trag asked, out of consideration, "What did you do then?"

"Oh, roamed the French Quarter like a bum. I was big for my age then, only sixteen, but I could pass as twenty in any of the bars in the quarter, and that's where I learned about queers. There are as thick as flies on a cow-pile down there. I found

one guy who let me run the bar of his for a while, got fed up, thought he owned me body and soul and I started stealing. Newspaper machines, pinball machines, small crap, nothing big, nothing professional. Now I never robbed anybody I knew, not any of my friends, just business places. Got scared, ran off to Texas, almost starved to death down there, so one day I up and turned myself in. They brought me back to Louisiana and sent me up for a year."

"How long you been out?"

"Oh, six months to the fifth of this month," he said, knowing to the day, the hour of his release. "Met a girl, rather a bitch over in Port Allen, borrowed five hundred dollars from a gay friend of mine, got married." He looked away sadly. "Didn't last a month, that is, when the five hundred was out. Been hustling ever since."

"Have you thought about getting a job, going straight?"

"Man, listen, Trag." He shrugged. "When you've served time you don't just get out and go legit. When they find out your an ex-con, they'll fire you on the spot. It gets rough, honest, rough."

"Well, nobody's life is a grand picnic," Trag said, remembering his own, which was as bitter as gall.

"Bet you've been the All-American boy," Jesup said, trying to smile, but it was more of a frown than a smile.

"I was, up until I was thirteen, and my mother and father died," he said; and before he realized what he was saying, first sparsely then thoroughly, he was telling Jesup his whole life, his reign with his uncle, his sexual demands, his joining up in the marines, mostly to get away from the friction of his life with his uncle, the mental imprisonment.

"I guess you know your uncle was lying to you all that time," Jesup said dryly, when Trag was through talking.

Trag breathed a regrettable sigh.

"I know that now, I didn't then. But he was good to me, and I think he did care, that is, what happened to me. He made sure I had a high school diploma, class ring, new suit, and everything. And he even gave me a car for graduation. But, he did lie to me, just so I would let him fool with me, I guess. He was a timid man, didn't go out much, never went to gay bars, not like some of those brazen bitches I've known later."

"Do you think he caused you beinq like that?"

"I don't think so. I like girls, and I don't consider myself queer. It's just this other something, like you mentioned, this magnetism, this male force which I can't understand."

"Maybe we are queer," Jesup put it bluntly. "I mean, maybe all queers feel like us, that what THEY do ain't queer."

“Maybe so," Trag agreed. "Maybe that is how they got started , their first coming out. Some man, like my uncle, had a lot of influence over them, or like that big guy you had in prison, they just had something over us we couldn't shake.”

"It's a hella of a life," Jesup replied, flipping the ashes from his cigarette, and rubbing Trag's leg with his foot. "Nothing lasts. Nothing. If you meet a score who likes you he gets fed up with you in a month, and picks up somebody younger. They want you to love them, but they don’t want to shell out the lettuce. They just use you, then want to kick you out. Oh, they come on strong at first, tell you how good looking you are, want you to live with them for the rest of your life, then once you move in that put the clamps on you, bitch, bitch, bitch. They want you just to stay right there in their damned apartment and never go out. If you do, even with them, they're jealous of everybody you speak to. It's rotten, trying to live with an old queer. They expect the impossible. I'm a patient person, and I go along with a lot of their crap, but this jealous stuff I can't take. That's why I prefer the one night stands, give them what they want as long as they give you money for it!"

Trag turned suddenly, disheartened, and looked at him. "Is that the way you feel about me... us?"

Jesup was silent for a minute. "Nah, and you know it, Trag. But-, you just can’t trust anyone anymore, at least I can’t. Like tonight, you and I will make it, then daylight and that other world. You’ll go your way and I'll go mine and we may never see each other again."

"That don't have to be that way," Trag said, hopeful, or, daring to hope, though he did not sense why. "What's to keep us from seeing each other, having sex... nothing!”

Jesup blinked, wiped his eyes with long tapering fingers and turned his face to the opposite wall. "Let's forget it," he murmured, his voice shaky.

"Okay," Trag said, crestfallen. Then an emptiness fell in his heart and, turning on his right side, he gazed with new longing at Jesup's wondrous body, his savage darkness, the terrific and ferocious darkness of him, and he wondered forlornly, pondered that, but a moment ago they were locked maddeningly in sex, enjoying each other's body to the limits of their male desires, while now something cold and meaningless had come between them.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, feeling agony in his heart. "I... I just don't... don’t ever want to lose you... that's all."

"You won't," Jesup said, "So why talk about it… huh?”

Trag, a pain stabbing his side, lapsed into accepted silence. No use to talk about it. No use to do anything... make

plans, feel, want.

The room became a solemnity of peace, noiseless peace. Only the sounds of their breathing could be heard. Even the lounge downstairs had quieted down, and the cars seemingly had vacated the streets.

"Trag," Jesup whispered after the long maw of silence, his head still turned to the opposite wall.

"Yes."

"Would you like to use me... like a girl?"

Trag caught his breath. "But I thought you said that no one was ever going to..."

"It don't matter what I said," he interrupted, still not looking. "But for tonight, being with you, I like you, and I want to do, to do something for you, want to give you something that I have never given to anyone… like it was something special."

"It would be special to me," Trag assured him, reaching out and pulling him close.

"Love me," Jesup murmured gravely, the sound of his voice a mere whisper in the still room. And tears shimmered in his eyes. "Love me, Trag... make love to me!"

"I thank you for saying that," Trag cried, filled to the brim with elation, and an instant more he folded Jesup into his arms, pressed his lips against Jesup's lips, slid his hot tongue in between his parted teeth.

Then, as if they had been plugged into an electric socket, their bodies wreathed and plunged, their arms entwining, their thighs folded over the other's thighs, and as Jesup lifted up his pelvis wantonly, Trag's hard body found its mark, and it went deep into Jesup s body, slowly at first, then readily, profoundly, until it had sunken to the hilt.

With that one thrust, Jesup brought his long, graceful legs up and locked them around Trag's hips, pulled him down with his dark, powerful, heavily veined arms, and Trag began to pump productively, the very ultimate of his male power, his strength, his untamed ferocity digging into Jesup's uplifted body, feeling with wild tremors darting through him, the hot enclosure which folded around his driving power, the soft tissues parting, giving way as he prodded with the determination of a battling ram destined to knock a wall down.

And he would burst through that wall, breaking the thin layers of silken flesh, thrilling both himself and Jesup as he drove inward and onward.

Sweat, now in wild relentless streams, streaked their naked bodies with silvery trails, and the constant churning of one body against the others made harsh noises. They made all sorts of weird and garbled noises that served to add to the sheer

ecstasy of it all.

With unreasoning anxiety now they both became furies of the hottest kind of passion. Male strength running cross grain to male strength, which in a sense was sheer brutality, both bodies hungrily driving frantically to please, to thrill the others, yet overlapping this hunger the ultimate goal of both men, to please themselves. This was not the effeminate nature in correlation with the male. This was the hard core of the male against the hard core of another male, both driving desperately to realize whatever sexual urge which controlled them, in fact threatened to master them.

With Jesup conquering Trag, it was the most heavenly sensation. He lost all reserves in an attempt to reach the top and at the same time prolong that rapturous thrill until the exact moment he willed it, and in his regular thrusts and withdrawals, his hard muscles, his masculine strength using and burning itself out, Jesup began to squirm and cry out with hurtful, lisping cries. Tears ran unchecked down each side of his face, and his eyes where lit up with raw lust. His dark head was bent back, his eyes rolling, his mouth gaped open, and numerous tiny wrinkles rose on his brow. The entire upper portion of his body, his chest, his abdomen muscles were taut with strain, and the veins along his arms stood out an inch thick.

He gave a piercing cry, and Trag smothered him in his arms, kissing away his tears. “Am I hurting you?” he asked, out of genuine concern, though his own flesh, with every nerve running from its hilt to every muscle in his body, was lending him sensation upon sensation.

“I… I want you to hurt me,” Jesup sobbed openly. “Don’t stop! Please don’t stop!”

His rasping voice, his savage pleadings, seemed to galvanize Trag in an even more rapturous action, and he worked his pelvis like a treadmill, hunching so ruthlessly that each time he pushed his body forwards Jesup gasped haunting screams. Jesup’s arms around his back and shoulders now were like steel, and his legs interlocking his buttocks were like giant scissors.

The ballast in Trag’s body, deep in the fiery pit of his loin, began to boil, to froth, and with a last tantalizing lunge he felt the supreme top, feeling, as it spread into his partner’s self made source, its hot, oily substance. His body slid in and out now with greater laxity, with a fluid penetration bordered on simple madness.

The flesh cave had been oiled, lubricated with his own hot lust, and the sensation of his body sliding in and out of the tissues made love itself all the more fascinating a thing.

Sexually spent now for the moment, both his and Jesup’s

bodies slackened in their painful grip, and with tears of joy streaming down his own face, Trag kissed those of Jessup’s away.

CHAPTER 10

For a long while in silence they lay thusly joined, locked, both mentally and physically, then Trag slid out and, with fond arms, pulled Jessup to him.

"I've needed loving… so long," Jesup cried in his arms, his face resting in the hollow of Trag's neck. "Nobody's ever treated me like this, loving me… it's all been sex, just sex."

"I'll always love you… like this," Trag said with earnest, stroking Jesup's cheek, kissing him fondly on the brow, brushing back his long, black hair. "If… if you'll only let me."

Jesup was silent then, and for an immeasurable time both men lay close, relishing the warmth of the other's naked body, the timelessness of the moment, their moment, regardless of what happened outside this room, this lodge. Tonight, whatever they may be forced to become in the daylight, tonight, this was their moment of ecstasy, this lovely room their world.

Then, as if on cue, obeying a voice the Trag did not, could not hear, Jesup got up and went into the bathroom. In a little while he came out again and sat down on the bed, away from Trag so that their bodies would not touch. He had washed his face in cold water, and had combed back his beautiful hair, and looked aloof, in disdain, not at all like the passionate savage in Trag's arms a moment ago. He seemed cold now, reproachful, and this worried Trag, so much in fact he could not help asking, "Jesup... what's wrong?"

"Nothing," he replied, staring at his hands in his lap. "Just, just that I want you to forget that I acted so nellie a while ago, so bitchy, crying all over the place."

"There's nothing to forget," Trag put in, puzzled. "I want to remember this, always."

"I got carried away," Jesup attempted to explain, his eyes lost of their deep luster. "I just needed someone… someone to hold me, someone I could pretend for a moment that… that… cared."

Trag glared at him, his mouth a round O.

"But I do care, Jesup, honest. I think we are good for each other. I need you and you need me. So why deny things. Why take things back, spoil everything."

"Oh, I'm not trying to take anything back. I just made a fool of myself, that's all, a damned weeping fool! I know you don't understand, Trag, but day after day, night after night with this same stuff. Not with you, I mean, but with all them other cold bitches, I just wanted to feel that someone cared, to be loved… for once."

"Don't you think I care?"

Jesup looked at him sadly, and his expression was one of undetermined blandness, as if he was undecided to say a kind lie in answer or the awesome truth. “I don’t know,” he finally answered. “I just don’t know. I want to find somebody to care for, and for them to care for me in return. I want someone I can depend on, someone who respects me for what I am rather than what they can get out of me. When I go to bed with a guy one night and these is an agreement that he will pay me so much the it is all settled. He makes the scene, gives me the money and we cut out. I’ve done that so much I guess I expect it of everybody, even you.”

“I don’t let sex with other men dominate my life,” Trag made an excuse to explain. “Sex isn’t everything to me. I would rather have honest to goodness friends than sex anytime, someone I can know and look up and admire and respect. Of course, if I have all that plus the sex thing thrown in then all the merrier for us both. The marines is the most important thing in my life, Jess. It’s my career, and we travel so much I know I will never get married, to drag a wife to hell and gone. And I like travelling and seeing new places and learning about everything. But if I had a friend, someone who understood me, to have sex with too, then it would be alright for him to follow me, and we could see each other as often as we could.”

“In other words, you would like for me to follow you, be with you, live with you?”

“Yes,” Trag answered, and his heart was in his eyes.

“I’d be no good at it,” Jesup warned, and his gaze had that look of doom and damnation. “It’d be fine for a little while, then some guy would come along who I thought might offer more and I’d up and leave with him.”

“How do you know you would?”

“I’ve done it before, Trag. I’m rotten through and through.”

“I don’t believe that.”

“Well, I am. Always looking for green pastures on the other side of the fence.” He shrugged, let out a faint chuckle. “My old man once said that anything you want is on the side of the mountain. And I’ve tried all my life to prove to him he’s wrong. I think all the goodies are on the other side of the mountain, so, I just jeep looking and roaming.”

Trag looked at him in sad puzzlement, realizing he was getting nowhere. “But you said yourself that you wanted someone you could trust and respect, and could depend on, and you can trust me, and depend on me, try and believe me, Jess. Don’t throw all this away when at last we have found each other. At least give it a chance.”

“It’s no good,” Jesup said, bowing his dark head, his

Indian mane falling into his eyes, and he looked all the more the savage, the naked savage squatting before a campfire. "Do you honestly realize what you are saying? I'm a bum! I'm an ex-con, been in and out of jails half of my life. And I hate word and I drink and I get into fights, and I just ain't worth a damn. That's the reason I hustle, I just ain't worth a fiddler's bow. Did you ever meet a jostler who was worth anything, who wasn't the laziest coot you ever saw? No you ain't for that's why they're hustlers. If they were half a man they wouldn't let a man swing on them just for a lousy few bucks. A man has guts enough to get up and make himself a living, not depending on some fat, bald-headed queer to give him a few meager hand outs just cause he turned up his tail. If you knew the whole truth about me, Trag, the real truth, you wouldn't even speak to me on the street, let alone fool with me in this room."

"I know I like you, that we're good in bed together, and that's all that is important to me," Trag replied in a rasping voice.

"But you don't know me," he shouted. "And that's why I'm trying to tell you. I'm no damned good. I'd keep you in hot water half of your time!"

Trag eased a little closer to him, realizing at last why he was putting up such a fight, why he was complicating matters with a lot of excuses. "You don't mean a word you're saying. You like me, Jess, just as I like you, and you're saying these things because you're afraid you'll hurt me someday, afraid that if you can't keep your side of the bargain you will make me unhappy in the end, now aren't I right?"

Jesup shrugged, puffed like mad on his cigarette. "Well, what if I am?" he grunted.

"Don't you see, Jess? Don't you understand you're fighting the very things you want, are hoping for, striving for, living for? Someone like me. Just like I am looking for someone like you. If we had this, had each other, then maybe you wouldn't drink and fight and shack with just anyone, maybe not anyone else at all. Don't you see that this is why you drink and fight and end up in jail? It's because you're lonely and have nothing to live for, no one to live for. It's about the same with me. I stand the loneliness just so long, then I go off on a tangent. That was where I was going when I met you, off on a damn binge, or to New Orleans on a wild spree with a marine buddy. But… but… if we had each other to look forward to seeing, doing things with, having sex with, we would cancel out all this misery, then you and I would really begin to live, to hope, like other people."

Jesup eyed him with watery eyes, their glitter smothered by his long curling lashes. "Wish you were right. Of, the hell with

it. I wish to hell and gone I'd never drink again or fight or get in the can, or hustle again. How I hate hustling! If I thought I'd never have to drop my jeans to another sick queer again, I'd be about the happiest nut in the whole messed up, screwed up world."

"Then… let's give it a chance," Trag pleased, the sound of his voice like waves coming in on rocks, awesome, piercing. "At least, if we try and fail we haven't lost much. And, if we don't try we'll always wonder if it would have worked. After meeting and being with you, I don't ever want to go back to those old lonely times again, ever!"

Jesup looked at his then, and something of understanding and hope lit up the dark pupils of his gaze, and he looked youthful and innocent again, immune to the callowness of the world.

Jesup thrust out his right hand, lay it warmly on Trag's naked thigh, gripped it firmly. "You know," he said pensively, "tonight, tonight when I went into that lousy damned lounge I figured it was the end for me. I just didn't want to go through another night like the past fifty, being felt up by sissy fruits! But when I started talking to you, I began to see that there are other people who feel as I do and I said to myself that maybe here is the one, the right guy I've been looking for all along. And I said something else. I said, I'm going to go all the way with him, this once, make him happy, even if I can't make myself happy."

"But that is happiness," Trag assured him, laying his hand on top of Jesup's. "You have to give in order to take."

Jesup gazed at him with a quizzical gaze that Trag failed to understand the meaning of, and he said with a cocky air, "We'll be sprouting wings next!"

Jesup rose then and went to the windows where he pulled the heavy drapes back by their cords and opened the blinds. He then stood for a quiet moment in the faint light, inhaling his cigarette, slowly, deliberately, as though he enjoyed every moment of it. "Well, it's getting daylight," he said at last, the sound of his voice, his tone sad, bewildered. "Time to get back to that other damned straight world!"

Trag looked up at him in pleasant surprise, feeling the terrible burden, the apathy of those well chosen words and, getting up from the wrinkled bed, he went and stood beside him. "You don't ever have to go back, Jesup, if you don't want to," he murmured, his heart in his throat. "You don't ever have to hustle again either, if you hate it so much."

"Then what shall I do?" he asked with sarcasm in his voice, a touch of venom. "Starve and die in the streets and let the state bury me in a paupers grave? I'm an ex-con, baby! I

couldn’t get a job and hold it, even if I wanted it.”

“Do,” Trag whispered, catching him around the waist and laying his head in the beautiful hollow of his shoulders. “I’ll tell you what you can do. You can come with me. I’ll cancel my furlough to New Orleans, wire Ted Brenson that I’m not coming, and we’ll catch the next bus back to Corpus Christi. And I’ll find us an apartment outside the naval base and we’ll just live for a change, and love and fool when we damned please. And you won’t ever have to hustle again or worry again about where your next meal is coming from or where you’re going to stay. It’ll be our home, yours and mind and everything I make will be ours to spend, just the way we want it. I want this Jess, honest. I want it more than I have every wanted anything in my life, so please don’t say no, please don’t say you won’t go!”

CHAPTER 12

When Trag was through talking, Jesup turned slowly and looked at him thoughtfully, a look that pierced Trag's heart and sent it into flames of deep emotion. "You're asking for trouble, plenty of trouble," Jesup said softly, though his meaning was firm, a little frightening.

"I can expect that," Trag answered. "I've lived in trouble all my life. It is better, I think, to live in trouble and have you than to live in trouble without you."

Jesup smiled a wry smile and, taking Trag's chin in his nimble fingers, lifted his face to his. "You honestly want to go through with this utter madness?"

"Yes," Trag stammered, and his feeling for this half-breed glowed like firelight in his eyes.

Jesup dropped his hand, breathed heavily for a moment, then turned from the window. "Alright, baby, we'll give it a go."

All of a sudden they were like children, or young men reborn into a child-like state. They joked, kidded, played and fondled each other in this their new ultimatum. They went into the shower and soaped each other down, marveling at each others feel. Their groping the other's body came more freely to them now, as if one body ultimately belonged to the other, and they possessed the privilege to take liberties they had not taken before.

In their play, tussling, slipping on the wet tiles, hugging, Jesup got himself all excited and hugging Trag to him firmly, thrust his body between his legs and took him in the thighs. Their bodies were like oiled eels, and clinging to one another became almost a small battle within itself, their bodies so lathered with the white foam of soap and water.

Trag tried to stand erect, his legs pressed firmly together, while Jesup kept his long, hard body moving in and out between the slippery opening in his thighs. It all added much to Jesup's sensations.

Finally, Jesup erupted, clinging to Trag as if he was a life line, then they took a cold shower together and dressed.

They had breakfast in the cafeteria lodge, then, in the early morning air walked to the bus terminal.

Trag considered he had never seen such a day. The early morning dew was still on the shrubs and magnolias, and they shone in the new sun as if they had been caparisoned with diamonds. The night men had already cleaned the streets of debris, and they looked as if they had been scrubbed with soap and water. Wisteria vines in full bloom, like hundreds of purple grapes, hung over the iron lace fences, and Spanish Daggers,

charged by the warm light, stood in flag stoned patios like fiery sentinels. The scent of honeysuckle and rose and the deep fragrance of cape jasmine and magnolia hung in the air like perfume, raiding his mind, and Trag felt that he had never been this happy before in his life. For once life and everything in it took on new zeal, new meaning.

He could not keep his gaze from Jesup, tall and straight in his tight jeans and black cowboy boots. "I'm so happy," he could not help but say, putting his heart into words.

"Are you?" Jesup asked, but as if he was merely making a statement. At that his wild chattering waned to silence, and they continued on the rest of the way to the bus terminal without speaking.

There at the front entrance, amid a pushing crowd of people, mostly students, Jesup halted, "Well, this is as far as I go," he said meekly, trying not to look at Trag.

"What?" Trag cried, completely baffled. He gazed up into Jesup's shifting gaze and became suddenly filled with puzzlement and disappointment.

Jesup shook his head, his hands thrust child-like in his jean's pockets. "I'm not going with you," he stammered, his voice shaky and uncertain.

"But… I don't get it," Trag murmured, his hands out in the age old gesture of appeal. "I thought we had that settled."

"We ain't got nothing settled," Jesup said, lowering his eyes to the dirty pavement.

Trag shook his head, his brow a furrow of wrinkles, his eyes leaping lights. "But you did say you was going back to Corpus Christi with me, didn't you, that... that we were going to live together?"

"I said that... and a lot of other things," Jesup replied, turning his whole body from right to left, as if he did not wish to discuss the matter, that he longed to disappear from Trag's gaze instantly.

"You mean they were all lies?" Trag persisted, his heart turning to flame over what Jesup might answer, the verdict which might send him back to his old, drab, lonely world.

"Yes," Jesup said firmly, his teeth clinched, the hard veins standing out vividly along his arms, his neck.

"That you don't want me... sexually... no... no?"

At that Jesup turned quickly, gauging the swarming crowds reaction, to see If any of them had overheard.

There were several giggles, stares, the rapid turning of heads, the lifting of eyebrows and, taking Trag by the arm, Jesup led him up the hill a piece, to the corner where the huge building had loomed so ominously the previous night. They paused where a strong black iron lace fence came to join, and Trag

looked up at him frantically, desperately, his heart thumping like a drum, the blood racing through his veins like unleashed tightening.

"Trag, baby, listen," Jesup began, looking down at him, his eyes losing all their quicksilver glow, now only dull orbs fixed boldly and steadfastly on his. “It's no damned good. I can't go through with it!"

“But why? Can't you tell me why?” Trag half-shouted, ignoring the people hurrying by, loaded with suitcases and handbags and books.

“I’d foul up,” Jesup answered. “Like I always do, with everybody I meet. I ain't man enough to stick to my side of the bargain. I ain't got no guts, no... what you call it... no sense of loyalty."

“But how do you know if you don't give it a try?"

“I've given it plenty of tries,” Jesup came back hurtingly, yet not wishing to hurt. “I could name you a list a mile long of the guys I've tried to live with, and I screw them up every time. I just up and leave or something. Anyway they're always stuck with the bag. Have to get over me, all that jazz."

“So you call it jazz!" Trag stormed, a tiny fury over having been made a fool of, and so easy, so painless. "I call it something else. I call it friendship or love or countless names I could name instead of JAZZ!”

"Now don't go and get your damper up,” Jesup said lowly, trying to remain calm. "You ain't lost much. One night wallowing with me. You didn't lose your virginity. Besides, in another week, you won't even remember what I look like."

"You want to bet on that?"

Jesup laughed a torn and somewhat bitter laugh. "Wouldn't you forget me, Trag, with all them fine looking marines to play around with... now wouldn't you forget me?”

Trag looked at him with ice in his gaze, "No, I wouldn’t, Jess, honest," he said, then his gaze warmed to the love he felt in his heart, "I won't ever forget you, even if I live to be a hundred years old. That's why I want you to go with me, us be together, always. I know I would be good for you, that out of this we can find something of happiness for the both us."

Jesup dropped his head, the strands of Indian hair falling like black silk, and busied himself rolling a small stone beneath his foot. "Trag, even if I did care...”

"But you do, don't you?" Trag interrupted, taking hold of his arm.

"Even if I did care, cared a whole damned lot," Jesus said again, still not looking up, "I care enough not to want to hurt you in any way, and I would hurt you, baby, I would. So… so it's best I go now, this morning, right now, before we get ourselves

so involved I'd never have the guts to leave you, or so damned sore at myself I'd leave you anyway, hurt you or not." He raised his head then and looked Trag squarely in the eyes. "So let's just quit talking about it."

"If it's the money," Trag cried persistent, "I don't give a damn about the money. I make enough money for us both. You wouldn't ever have to work, just be there with me, in the apartment when I get off duty."

Jesup pointed a finger at him in mock accusation. "See! That's one thing right there. Money. You paying for everything. My lying up naked waiting for you, like a damned male whore. Living off you, and you sweating it out in the marines."

"But I don't care," Trag cried, to the point of tears. "What else, who else do I have to work for. It would be a pleasure to..."

"No, but thank you, no," Jesup said, raising a hand as if to ward off his timely words. Now, let's say goodbye... as friends, what you say."

Trag blinked back tears, searched his eyes with his own. "Just one more twilight trick," he said softly, trying to be hateful this one last moment, this frantically desperate moment.

Jesup smiled an ironic smile. "Yes... just one more night's trick." He turned on his heel then, without saying another word, and made his way through the mob flushed out of a bus across the street.

Clutching at his heart, Trag stood in the pushing, shoving mob and watched him until he disappeared in the current of human flesh, feeling, as he saw his dark head vanish among the numerous other heads, that he would die if he lost him... lost him forever. And he had the odd sensation that, if he could never see him again, be with him, make love to him, then he never would, as long as he lived, desire nor want anyone else.

"If I lose him, I'm through... through with men!" he promised himself, and when he had returned to the terminal and bought his ticket and sat amid the rows of seats waiting for the bus to arrive, he said this to himself a second time as he watched two young people standing in front of the cigarette machine.

They were a girl and boy, hardly out of their teens, and one of the best looking couples he thought he had ever seen. The boy was dressed in marine blues, white barracks cap, white gloves, his tunic fitting immaculately to his broad shoulders and tiny waist to masculine perfection. The girl was a radiant, pixie blonde, with Camelot hair, silvery lips, and eyes as big as a painted doll's. She was dressed in a canary yellow miniskirt on which were stitched huge golden sunflowers, white opera boots, and strands of long giddy beads. They looked so

natural there in the morning haze, almost unreal they were so innocent, so clean, the slanting rays flooding in through the tall glass panes to brighten their faces like polished porcelain.

Their young faces were happily imprinted with smiles, which they lavished on each other, and their steadfast gaze was something magnetic, intrinsic. They seemed to be so madly in love with each other, so much the perfect American couple, that thoughts of last night with him and Jesup all but unhinged his mind. And he made a second vow that he would leave all men alone, that he would take up the role of a real marine, be a full fledged man, like this kid only half his age. And sitting there alone, still yet so young, so handsome, so desirable himself, he felt pangs of jealousy for these two beautiful people, two people even far removed from their own present hippie age, for they stood alone in their beauty, their oneness, and in them, their obvious happiness in loving each other, he gauged his own loneliness now without Jesup, thought he had grown to know him only the duration of one night, one short precious night, his own unhappiness.

And as the noisy bus pulled out with him and rumbled over the new river bridge west, toward Lafayette and Crowley and Lake Charles and Port Arthur, he could hardly retain his calm, his heartbreak.

Each turn of the wheels was roaring him further and further from Jesup, their world, their room of happiness and rapture, and he felt he could nor endure, with any fortitude, the pain jamming up at his throat, threatening to strangle his tortured heart.

But when they had crossed the river and into the little village of Grosse Tete, the bus slowed, stopped, and someone got on.

It was Jesup!

With a wild flooding in his heart, Trag watched him make his way down the aisle and to the rear where he sat. He slipped into the empty seat beside him and secretly gripped his hand.

“Change your mind?" Trag asked in anticipation, not believing his eyes, not believing his betrayed and mutilated heart.

"I got to thinking,” Jesup blurted out, his eyes sad, filled with tears which he tried to blink back. "Got to thinking what the hell I was doing staying back there in that hell hole in the first place, nothing to do, not knowing anybody, just walking the damned streets.” He stopped talking, swallowed hard, and his voice came again nervous and strained. "Got to thinking too about last night... us together. And I know you're right. I do believe you care, and that's all that matters a damn to me.”

”I do care... very much,” Trag assured him, and the light of that knowledge shone like a beacon in his fiery-lit eyes.

"We just gonna go,” Jesup said then, glancing out the window to the endless flat bayous. "Go and do anything we please, and ain’t nobody going to do anything about it, just go and be together, you and me. So, what you say? Let's just go and don't say no more about it."

THE END